

D 3

Tim and the Hidden People

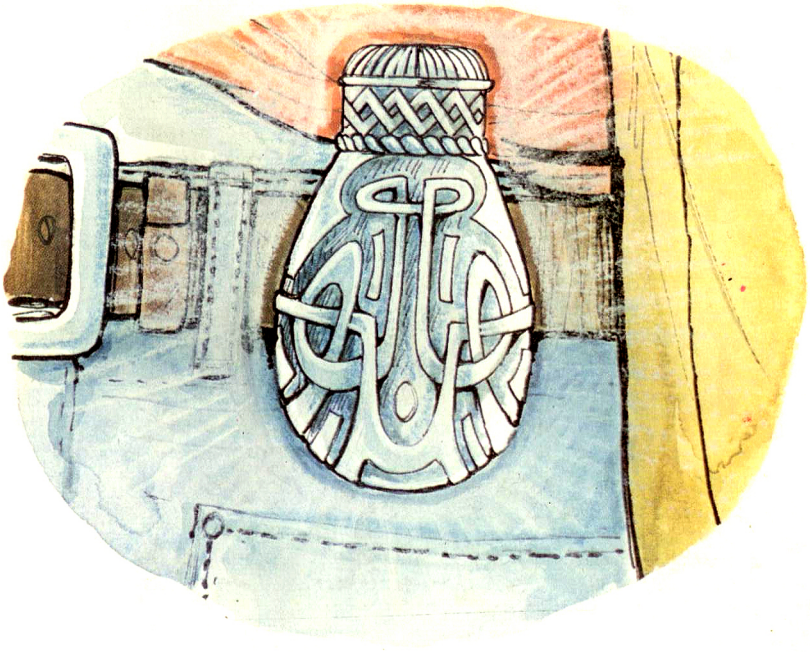
# The Shield Stone

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer



# The Shield Stone



Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer



ARNOLD-WHEATON





Tim and Arun were riding the night-mares north, under the stars. Tim looked down into the darkness below him. He saw the water of a lake, shining in the starlight. He looked across to the hills. The hills looked as if they had been cut out of black paper, and stuck on a background of the starry sky.

Tim looked down at the lake again. He was sure that he had seen the lake and the hills before. They must be nearly at Alan Tremaine's cottage.

The night-mares flew lower, between two hills. They glided down out of the sky, and landed gently on the ground. Tim could just make out the shape of a long, low, white cottage at the foot of a hill.

Sebastian, sitting just in front of Tim on the horse's back, purred loudly.

"We're here, Arun," Tim cried. "This is Alan Tremaine's."

As he spoke, the door of the cottage opened. The light streamed out into the darkness, and Alan Tremaine came out to meet them.

Sebastian jumped down on to the grass, and ran towards him.

"Tim!" cried Alan. "I'm thankful you're here. The witches' friends are out tonight, looking for you. Is this Arun? You're welcome, too, Arun. Let me take the bridles, and let the horses go. It will soon be morning, and night-mares must be hidden in their caves before the sun comes up."





Tim and Arun slid down off the horses' backs. Alan Tremaine slipped off the silver bridles. The great night-mares tossed their heads back. They took three steps on the grass, lifted their great wings, and flew up into the sky.

“Go inside quickly, both of you,” said Alan Tremaine. “I don’t know who is about tonight. The wind has been blowing from the south for a week now. I’ll put the silver bridles away, and be with you in a few minutes. There’s a friend of yours waiting to see you, too, Tim.”

Tim and Arun went into the cottage, with Sebastian at their heels. Alan shut the door behind them, and went off into the darkness.

An old, old lady was sitting by the fire. She had white hair, and bright blue eyes, and she smiled at Tim, and nodded her head.

“Grandmother Roon!” cried Tim.

“Yes, Tim,” said the old lady. “I am Grandmother Roon. Alan has broken the witches’ spell, and I can speak again.”





"I'm so glad," said Tim. He turned to Arun. "Grandmother Roon gave me the silver chain – the one I wear round my neck – when I was here before. Mandrake and his witch friends had put her under a spell, and she couldn't talk." He turned to Grandmother Roon again. "This is Arun," he said. "He's my friend."

"You are very welcome, Arun," said Grandmother Roon. "Tim will need a good friend with him, if he is going to break open the stone prisons."

The door opened, and Alan Tremaine came in. He locked the door behind him.

"Sit down by the fire, both of you," he said. "I'll get you some breakfast, and then you must sleep. It will soon be day." He smiled at them. "You'll soon learn to sleep by day, and travel by night, Arun, when you're out with Tim."

They sat down by the fire. Alan Tremaine went into the little kitchen at the back, and cooked eggs and bacon, and made tea. He carried it all in on a tray, with a saucer of milk for Sebastian, and set it on the table.

"You'll feel better after that," he said.

"I feel as if I'd never been away," said Tim.

Alan and Grandmother Roon sat and talked to them, while they ate their breakfast by the fire.

Tim and Arun told them about their camp in the wood, and how Stareth had saved them from the witches' friends, and taken them to the night-mares by the ruined house.

“We told the wood people you were coming, and they were on the look-out for you,” said Alan. “The wood people are friends of the night-mares. So are the moor people. They will all help you.”

“Are they Hidden People?” asked Arun.

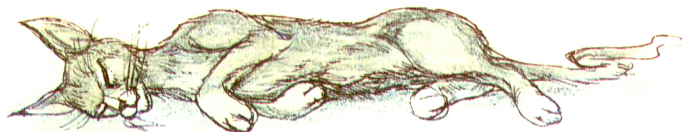
Alan Tremaine nodded. “There are many different kinds of Hidden People, Arun,” he said, “just as there are many different kinds of Ordinary Folk. The wood people and the moor people are our friends. You can trust them. But you must get some sleep now. We’ll talk about all this later.”

Alan took the two boys to the room at the back of the cottage, and Sebastian trotted along after them. A big, four-poster bed stood at one side of the room, with a chair beside it.

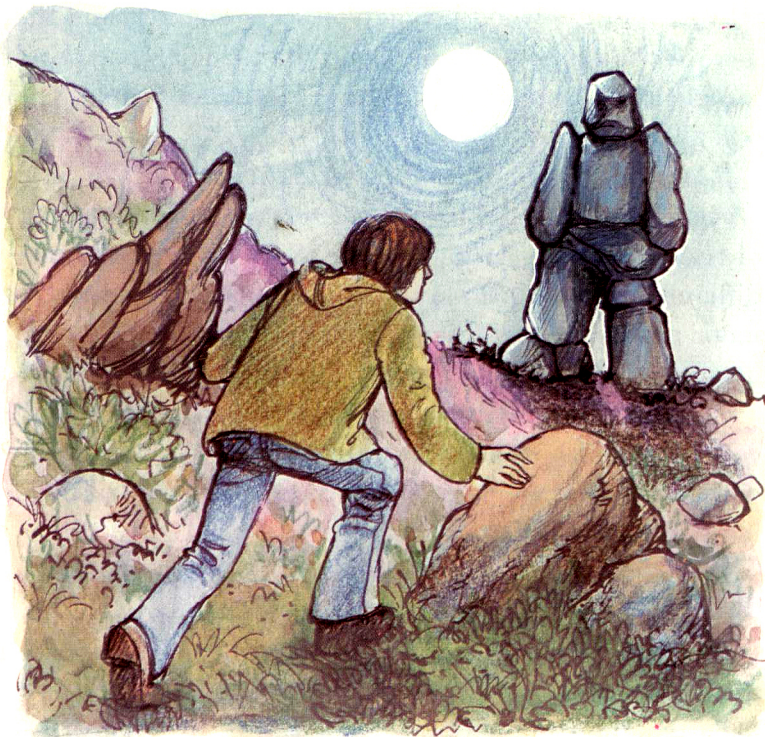
“Lie down on the bed and sleep,” said Alan Tremaine. “I’ll wake you for supper. We have a lot to do tonight.”

He gave each of them a blanket, and the boys took off their shoes and lay down on the bed, just as they were. Sebastian jumped up, purring, and lay down at Tim’s feet.

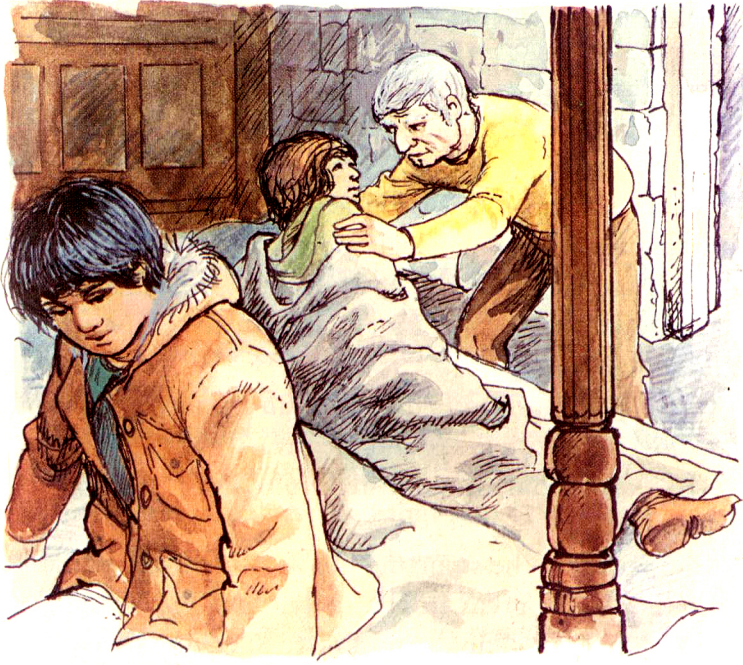
The boys were very tired. They only had to close their eyes, and they were asleep.







Tim was dreaming. In his dream, he found himself on the moors. It was night, and he was making his way down a hill, creeping through gorse and heather. The moon was shining down. There was a cold wind blowing, and Tim knew that he was afraid of something. He looked up, and in front of him he saw what he thought was a man. But when he looked again, it was just a pile of stones.



Tim felt a touch on his arm. He started, and opened his eyes. Alan Tremaine was standing beside the bed, in the back room of the cottage on the moors.

Arun was already sitting up on the bed at his side, and Sebastian had gone.

“It’s time to get up,” said Alan Tremaine. “The sun is beginning to set. Come and have supper. It’s on the table.”

The boys washed their hands and faces in the little kitchen, and went back into the living room.



It was cold, and Alan had pulled the table up to the fire. Grandmother Roon was there already, and she smiled at them as they came in. Then she gave Tim a long look. "Have you been dreaming, Tim?" she asked gently. Tim nodded.

Sebastian jumped up on to the table, and Alan sat down with them. He had cooked some fish, and there were oatcakes and jam and cheese to follow.

Arun was hungry, but Tim couldn't eat very much. He couldn't forget his dream.

When they had finished supper and cleared the table, they moved their chairs round the fire.

"How much did Melinda tell you, Tim?" asked Alan Tremaine.

"She said that the stone men have shut Nicola's mother and father up in great stones – stone prisons, I think she called them," said Tim. "And I have to get the silver water for you, to break the stones and set them free."

"Did she tell you about the silver web?" asked Alan.

Tim nodded. "She told me that I have to break a silver web, to get the water," he said. "*You* can't do it, because you are one of the Strange Ones. But I'm just one of the Ordinary Folk, and so is Arun, so we can break the web."

"So *you* can break the web, Tim," said Alan. "You'll have to do that alone. Arun will stay with me."

"I'm going with Tim," said Arun.

“We’re both going with him,” said Alan Tremaine. “But we can only go part of the way.”

Arun shook his head. “It’s too dangerous for Tim to be alone,” he said. “I must go with him. I can see the Hidden People. I’ve got the silver key.”

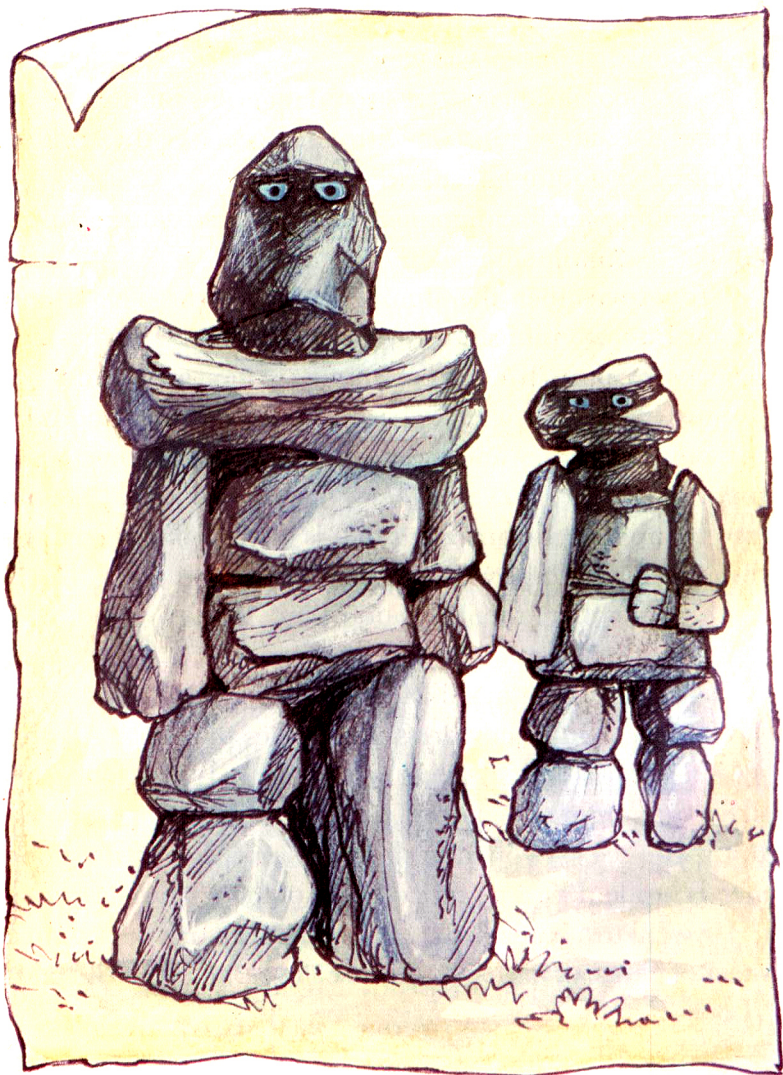
“Listen to me for a moment, Arun,” Alan said. “I must tell you about the stone men.

“You remember the stump people, Tim? The stump people are invisible, Arun, but they make bodies for themselves out of old tree stumps. They get inside the stumps, and use their branches and roots for arms and legs. It is only when they are inside a tree stump that you can see them at all, and then you only see their eyes. You can see the tree stump too, of course, but that is just like clothes, which they can drop whenever they want to.”

“I remember them,” said Tim. He shivered. He remembered the stump people only too well.

“The stone men are like the stump people,” said Alan Tremaine. “Only they dress themselves in stones. All you see is a pile of stones standing on the moor. It may look a bit like a man from a distance. It may be only a pile of stones. But if you see eyes open in the headstone, one of the stone men is inside. I’ve a picture of some of them here.”

He went to a cupboard by the wall, and came back with a sheet of paper in his hand. “These are stone men,” he said. “Look.”





Tim took the paper and stared at it for a minute or two, Arun looked over his shoulder.

Then Tim looked up at Alan Tremaine, and shivered.

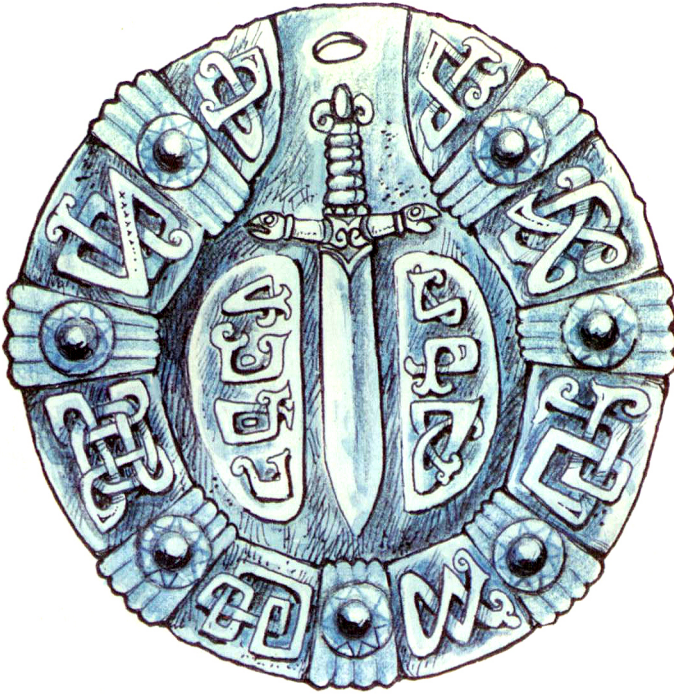
"I've seen a stone man," he said. "I saw him just now – in a dream. Only I didn't see his eyes."

Grandmother Roon leaned forward, and put her hand on Tim's arm.

"The stone men will not hurt you, Tim," she said. "Don't be afraid. I have the shield stone for you. It is a shield made of stone, and it will keep you safe from the stone men."

She got up and went over to the cupboard, and came back with an old, black wooden box. The lid and sides of the box had been carved. The carving on the lid showed an old tree, and the branches and leaves of the tree spread over the edges of the lid, and down the sides of the box.





Grandmother Roon opened the box, and took out a flat, round stone. It was about ten centimetres across. The stone had been shaped, so that it looked like a round shield. There were strange signs on it, cut deep into the stone. There was a little hole in the top.

“This is called the shield stone, Tim,” said Grandmother Roon. “It is a carved stone shield. It is magic. It is small, I know. But if you are given the shield stone on the night of the new moon, and if the right things are done, and the right spell is said, the shield stone will guard you from the stone men, from that time on.”

She handed the stone to Tim.

Tim took the stone and gazed at it, holding it in his open hand. It felt very cold.

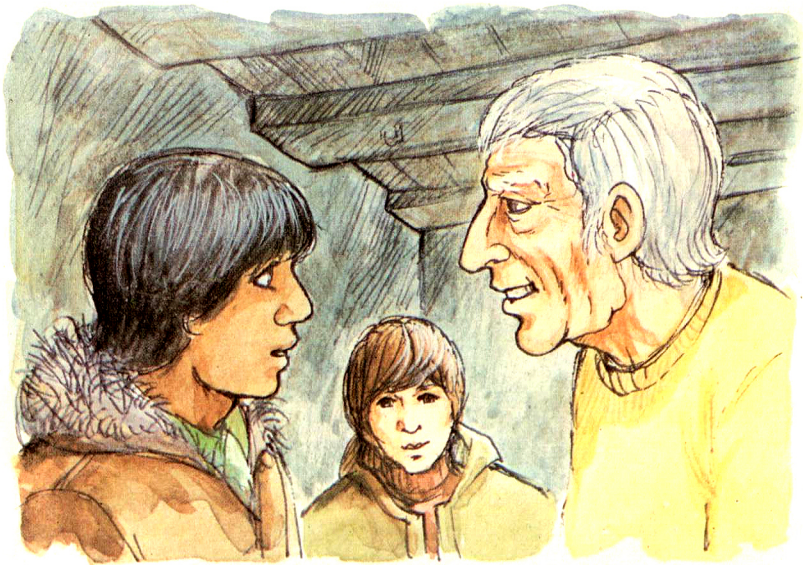
“There is a new moon tonight,” said Grandmother Roon. “I know what must be done, Tim. I know the words of the spell. I shall give you the shield stone tonight, and you must wear it round your neck. Then the stone men cannot hurt you. They will not even be able to see you. You need not be afraid of the stone men.”

“Will the shield stone guard Arun, too?” asked Tim.

Grandmother Roon shook her head. “It will only guard the person who is wearing it,” she said, “and there is only one shield stone. You cannot share it, and it must only be given away by the light of a new moon. Even then, the right spell must be said, or the stone can do nothing. You must keep it yourself. That is why you will have to break open the stone prisons alone. They are guarded by stone men. Give me the shield stone.”

Tim handed it back to her.





“Can’t I help Tim at all?” asked Arun.

Alan Tremaine turned to him. “Of course you can,” he said. “So can I. We shall go with him to Diaman’s Cave. The witches’ friends may be out, and Tim will need us both. And then we shall all three go to the place where the great stone prisons are. You and I can fight the stone men, by smashing down their piles of stones. The stone men move slowly. Before a stone man can get the stones together again, we can get away. But there will be too many of them, to fight our way through to the stone prisons. So Tim must go through, with the silver water. We’ll wait for him, and see that he gets safely home.”



The light was fading. Alan went across to the window, and looked out.

“The moon is rising over the hills,” he said. “The first stars are out. We must go outside, so that Tim can take the shield stone.”

They went out of the cottage.

The sun had set, but the sky was still light. A new moon was rising over the hills.



“Come over here, towards the hill, where the trees are,” said Alan Tremaine.

He led the way along a little stony path, towards some trees at the foot of the hill behind the cottage.

As they came closer to the trees, Tim saw that they grew in a ring. The heather grew up to the trees, but inside the ring of trees there was short, green grass.

In the very middle of the ring there was a long, flat, grey stone.



Grandmother Roon walked slowly across the grass to the other side of the grey stone. She turned to face them, and stood still.

“Come here, Tim,” she said. She spoke almost in a whisper, and yet Tim could hear every word she said.

Tim felt his hair lift. A shiver ran down his back.

He went slowly up to the grey stone.

Arun waited with Alan Tremaine, just inside the ring of trees. He wasn't very happy. He didn't want Tim to have to face the stone men alone, even if he had a stone shield. He felt something against his leg. He looked down, and saw Sebastian. Even Sebastian had not followed Tim to the grey stone in the middle of the ring of trees.

Grandmother Roon held out the shield stone towards Tim. “Hold out your hand, Tim,” she said. “Let the shield stone lie in your hand, under the sky and the stars. Let the new moon shine down on it.”

Tim held out his open hand, and Grandmother Roon put the shield stone on it.

She gripped his wrist with her own hand, while she whispered the spell:

“Stone shield of the stone men,  
Hide your keeper from stone men's eyes.  
Stone shield of the stone men,  
Keep him safe from the stone men's blows,  
Guard your keeper wherever he goes,  
And make him deaf to the stone men's lies.”



“Keep still, Tim,” she said softly. “Hold the shield stone out in the moonlight. Let it rest where it is, on your hand.”



Tim stood as still as a stone man, holding out his hand.

Grandmother Roon took a silver chain from her pocket. (It was just like the chain she had given Tim, when she last saw him.) She took the shield stone from Tim's hand. Tim's arm dropped to his side. Grandmother Roon pushed the chain through the hole in the top of the shield stone. Then she fastened the chain, and put it over Tim's head.

"Let us go back to the cottage," she said.

Tim felt as if he was walking in a dream. He put up his hand, and touched the shield stone. It felt cold and strange. It was heavier than the coin, but it wasn't as heavy as he had expected.

"Push it under your jersey, Tim," said Alan quickly. "It doesn't have to hang outside."



They went back into the cottage, and sat down again around the fire. Tim was looking very white, and Arun looked at him anxiously. Sebastian sat down at his feet, and pressed himself against Tim's leg.

"I'll get some tea," said Alan Tremaine.

They sat still, staring into the fire, until Alan came back from the little kitchen with four mugs of hot tea.

Tim gave himself a little shake, as if he were waking up from a dream. He took the tea, and drank some. He looked across at Grandmother Roon.

"Tell me what it all means, Grandmother Roon," he said. "What was the spell all about? I know the stone will keep me safe from the stone men, but I didn't understand all the spell."

"The stone will be your shield against the stone men, Tim," said Grandmother Roon. "It will guard you in three ways. You remember the first two lines of the spell,

'Stone shield of the stone men,

Hide your keeper from stone men's eyes?'"

Tim nodded.

"The stone shield was made by a stone man," said Grandmother Roon. "He made it for one of the Hidden People, long ago. It is an old story, and there is no time to tell you that tonight. But, because a stone man made it, it is called the stone shield of the stone men in the spell. We call it the shield stone. When you are wearing it, the stone men

cannot see you. So the shield stone hides you from the stone men's eyes.

"The stone men strike their enemies with their stone arms. When you are wearing the shield stone, they cannot touch you. So the stone will keep you safe from their blows.

"But they may hear you. If they know you are there, they will try to trick you into taking off the stone. Then they will tell you that the stone will kill you. They will tell you all kinds of lies. But when you are wearing the shield stone, you won't be able to hear them. So you will be deaf to all their lies. That is the meaning of the spell."

"But Tim will still be in danger, won't he?" asked Arun.

"He won't be in much danger from the stone men," said Alan Tremaine. "But the wind witches and their friends are out. Yes, we shall all be in danger."

He got up, and went over to the window.

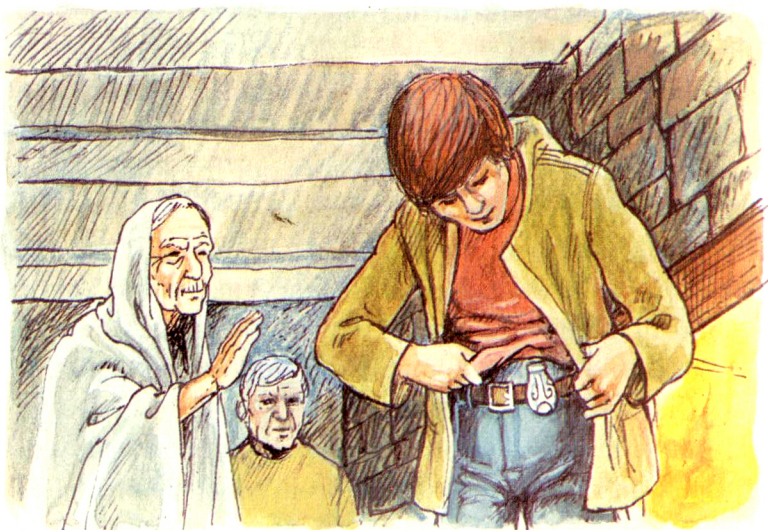
"It's dark outside now," he said. "The night-mares will soon be waiting for us in the ring of trees."

Grandmother Roon went to the cupboard by the wall. She opened the door and took out a little silver flask.

"This flask is for the silver water, Tim," she said, handing it to him. "Clip it on to your belt."

There were two clips on the back of the flask, and Tim pushed them on to his belt.

"You need not be afraid that the flask will fall off, Tim," said Grandmother Roon.



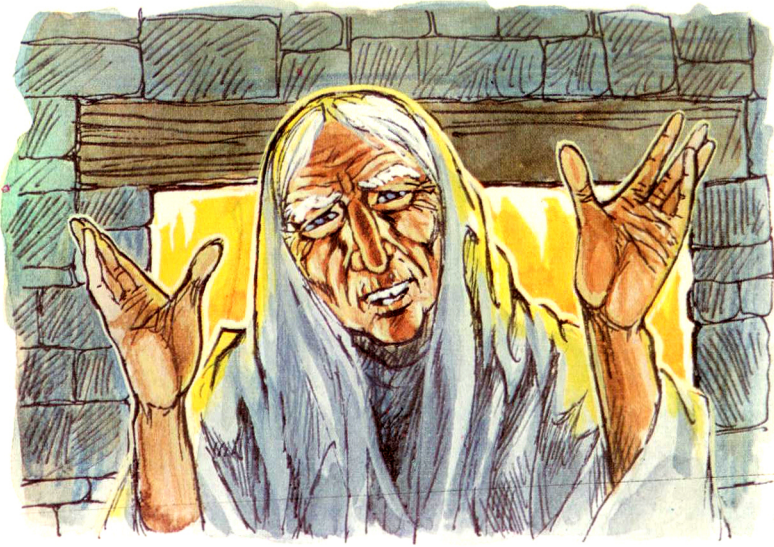
“Only you will be able to take it off your belt. No one else, and nothing else, will be able to move it. But pull your jersey down over it. There are many Hidden People who could guess what that flask is for.

“When you get to Diaman’s Cave, fill the flask with the silver water, and clip it back on to your belt until you need it. Alan and Arun will go with you to the Hill of the Stone Prisons. You must pour the water over the stones. As you pour the silver water, you must whisper the spell. Then the stones will break open, and their prisoners will be free.”

Tim pulled his jersey down, so that it hid the little silver flask.

“What spell?” he asked.





“Listen, and remember,” said Grandmother Roon.  
“This is what you must say:

Eyes that were shut by the cold stone,  
Look out of the stone, and see!  
Life that was hidden,  
Flesh and bone,  
Break out of the cold stone!  
Break the spell and be free!

“Speak the words as you pour the silver water, and the stones will break open.”

“But how shall I remember the words?” said Tim.  
“What happens if I forget?”



“Turn over the shield stone,” said Grandmother Roon.  
“The words are written on it.”

Tim pulled out the shield stone, and looked at the other side of it. When he had first seen it, that side of the stone had been grey and smooth. But now the spell was written on it in silver letters.

“Read the spell,” said Grandmother Roon.  
Tim looked at the stone, and read slowly:

“Eyes that were shut by the cold stone,  
Look out of the stone, and see!  
Life that was hidden,  
Flesh and bone,  
Break out of the cold stone!  
Break the spell, and be free!”

Grandmother Roon nodded her head.

“That is the spell, Tim,” she said. “And now you must all go. The night-mares will be waiting. Goodbye, and good luck go with you. May the three of you come back safely – no, the four of you, for I can see that the little cat is going too.”



Alan opened the door of the cottage, and looked out. There was no one on the moor. The new moon was shining down out of the dark sky.

“Come on,” he said, quietly.

They went outside, and Alan shut the door behind them. They heard Grandmother Roon turn the key in the lock.

They walked softly along the little path to the ring of trees.





As they went through the ring, three night-mares swung down out of the dark sky, and landed softly on the grass.

Alan called to them, and they answered with a soft sighing sound, like the wind in the trees.



Alan went to one side of the ring, and lifted up a small, flat stone which was lying on the grass.

There was a dark hole under it. He put in his hand, and pulled out three silver bridles.

The bridles shone in the dark, as if they were made of moonlight.

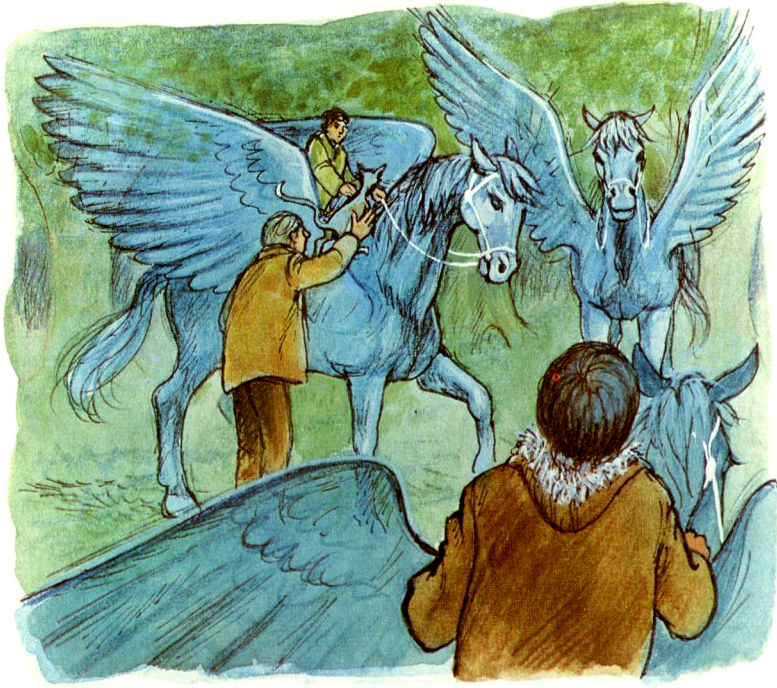


Alan walked quietly over to the night-mares. The nearest one dropped her head, and Alan slid the bridle over it. Then he went to the next horse, and the next. When each horse had a silver bridle, he turned to the two boys.

“We shall ride as far as the seashore,” he said. “There is a boat waiting for us. The silver water is in Diaman’s Cave, and Diaman’s Cave is on an island. The night-mares will leave us on the shore – they dare not fly out to Diaman’s Island.

“Mount your horses, and ride! We have a lot to do before morning.”





Arun and Tim each clambered on to the back of one of the night-mares. The mares stood quite still, sighing softly, until the boys were safely on their backs.

Alan Tremaine lifted Sebastian up, and set him on Tim's horse. Then he swung himself up on to the back of the third mare.

"Fly, night-mares, fly!" cried Alan Tremaine. "Fly to the shore where the dark caves are! I have hidden the boat in the caves."

The three night-mares lifted their wings, and took three steps across the grass. Then they were up and over the trees and flying over the hill.





# Flightpath to Reading **D3**

